

## ORGANIC CERTIFICATION FACT SHEET

A major tenet of organic agriculture is maintaining or improving soil quality and fertility. This factsheet covers USDA organic regulation §205.203, often referred to as the 90/120 day rule. Use the information and decision tree to determine how the rule applies to your certified organic operation.

The requirement to maintain or improve soil quality and fertility must be met through cultivation, crop rotation, planting cover crops, or applying plant and animal materials to manage crop nutrients, soil fertility, and soil organic matter content.  
No practices should contribute to contamination of crops, soil or water. **7CFR §205.203**

### Application timing of plant materials, compost, and manure

- Uncomposted or composted plant materials can be applied at any time to the soil, either incorporated into the soil or as a mulch.
- Any compost that includes manure must comply with the USDA organic regulations otherwise it is treated as raw manure. If it is composted in accordance with the regulations, it can be applied to the soil at any time.
- Raw or aged manure must be applied at least 90 or 120 days prior to crop harvest, depending on whether the edible portion of the crop makes contact with the soil surface or soil particles.

### Compost requirements

If your compost includes manure, USDA has specific requirements that must be met in order call it compost, versus raw or aged manure.

- Compost needs to be made with allowed feedstocks (non-synthetic substances and approved synthetic amendments).
- Compost must be mixed or managed to ensure that all of the feedstock heats to the minimum of 131° F (55° C) for a minimum of three days
- Once a compost pile has met the requirements, no more uncomposted manure can be added without the time and temperature requirements starting anew.

### Records to show compliance

Records which demonstrate compost production, application of compost or manure, and all input feedstocks must be kept and made available at inspection.

The type of records your operation needs to maintain will depend on your specific farm and production practices.

## Manure Application Decision Tree



### Additional Resources

#### USDA NOP Guidance: Compost and Vermicompost in Organic Crop Production

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/5021.pdf>

#### ATTRA: Manures for Organic Crop Production

<https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub-summaries/?pub=182>



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